

Legal Aid provides assistance on record sealing

Expungement program helps clients start over, rebuild lives

When someone is convicted of a crime, that conviction is logged in their criminal record. That record then follows them for life.

Having a “record” can create issues with employment opportunities, custody, or even purchasing a home, explained Dawn Spriggs, supervising attorney at Community legal Aid.

In fact, the U.S. Justice Department found in a [2009 study](#) that individuals with previous criminal convictions of any kind were 50 percent less likely to receive a job offer.

“The implications of that can be crushing,” said Spriggs, who has worked on expungement – or record sealing – cases in the past. “It can keep people from turning their lives around and changing for the better. And what’s worse, it can impact future generations.”

Spriggs cited a common issue Legal Aid attorneys see for expungement requests – passed due child support.

“If a parent can’t get or hold a decent paying job, how is he/she supposed to make child support payments?” she posed. “It’s a vicious cycle, and the child becomes the victim.”

Legal Aid’s goal in any case is to remove barriers that keep people from reaching physical and financial security, explained Executive Director Steven McGarrity. Expungement is one of the ways the organization does just that.

“The clients we see are really looking to start a new chapter,” McGarrity explained. “They want to start over. By having their records sealed, that’s just another potential issue we can help clear away so that they can obtain meaningful employment and start to rebuild their lives for themselves and their families.”

To demonstrate the program's significance, McGarrity highlighted the story below. Although name and identifying information have been changed to protect anonymity, the story is a true account of a real Legal Aid client.

Rob is a 30-year-old restaurant worker. He aspired to work for a local school, a better paying job that would help him and his young daughter live a better life than the one that she was living.

However, Rob was prohibited from achieving this dream because of his criminal record. Ten years ago, he was convicted of criminal damaging and criminal trespassing. So, when he applied for a job with the local school district, he was told that he would have to have his record sealed before he could.

Rob sought Community Legal Aid's assistance with an expungement. An attorney represented him at a probation interview, after which the court sealed his record in both cases. This development allowed him to further pursue employment with the school system.

In addition to pursuing this new career path, Rob is now an ordained minister and an active member of a local church.

“This was a case of man who was just trying to do right by his daughter, to give her a better life,” McGarrity said. “We were able to restore a little bit of hope for him, and it had the added benefit of helping that little girl.”

“These are the types of things people mean when they talk about ‘breaking the poverty cycle,’” McGarrity went on to say. “It may seem like one simple action, but it has implication for future generations.”

To learn more about Legal Aid's expungement work or other programs, or to seek help with a civil legal issue, visit the organization's website at www.communitylegalaid.org.

About Community Legal Aid

Community Legal Aid is a 501(c)3 non-profit law firms serving the legal needs of low-income individuals in central and northeast Ohio. Dedicated to improving the lives of those in need, Community Legal Aid provides free legal information and representation, as well as free education to those who work with the poor and elderly.

The non-profit firm serves clients in Columbiana, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull and Wayne counties.

Last updated on July 19, 2017.

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